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SERMON

PREACHED IN THE

PARISH CHURCH OF ST. JAMES,

Colchester,

ON TUESDAY, THE 1ST OF AUGUST, 1797,

for the benefit of the

SUNDAY SCHOOLS

ESTABLISHED IN THAT TOWN.



BY ROBERT ACKLOM INGRAM, B.D.

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ST. PAVON

TAVISH CHURCH OF ST. PAVON

Colchester

ON THE EASTERN FRONT OF ABBEY CHURCH

SUNDAY SCHOOLS



THE BRITISH MUSEUM

AND THE LONDON EXHIBITION

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THE BRITISH MUSEUM

A

SERMON, &c.

JEREMIAH, xxxi. 34.

THEY SHALL ALL KNOW ME, FROM THE LEAST OF THEM
UNTO THE GREATEST OF THEM, SAITH THE LORD.

THESE words, though predicted of *the house of Israel*, appear to be prophetically descriptive of that blessed period, when the Christian religion shall be universally disseminated throughout all nations; when *the kingdoms of this world are become the kingdoms of our Lord, and of his Christ*; and when *the earth shall be full of the knowledge of the Lord, as the waters cover the sea*. Notwithstanding the recent *overflowings of ungodliness*, and the clouds, by which the political horizon is still obscured, we are authorized from the *sure word of prophecy*, illustrated by an analogical survey of the benevolent dispensations of providence, to conclude, that the melioration of human society

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is graciously designed, and advancing,—that the cause of truth and virtue is progressive,—and that *the kingdom of heaven*, though it *cometh not with observation*, is gradually extending its sacred empire throughout all regions of the world. The benevolent institution, which is the object of this day's celebrity, we hope and trust, will prove a happy instrument, under the superintending direction of an almighty providence, in accelerating its glorious progress. The various advantages of an early religious education, and the particular benefits, that may be reasonably expected to result from SUNDAY SCHOOLS, have been so fully and ably illustrated before you on preceding occasions, that little remains for me to add, except to unite my testimony to that of those, who have addressed you before on the same subject, and to your own observations, that, after the experience of a competent number of years, the general effect has been answerable to the expectation, that was excited. I shall content myself therefore by presenting to your view a few arguments, deduced from the present critical posture of society, on the necessity of exerting every endeavour to promote the universal diffusion of religious knowledge.

It would be foreign from the present occasion to investigate the several causes,—the fact, it is

presumed, will be generally acknowledged,—that the proportional magnitude of that class, whose only dependence is daily labour, has long been increasing, while fewer opportunities remain of advancing themselves into more independent situations.* Thus unhappily deprived of the most powerful motives to honest and frugal industry, the mind is naturally reduced to the lowest state of moral and political debasement. With the ability the very desire also of improving their condition is nearly extinguished. Any temporary accession of wages causes only an addition of profligate expenditures. A good character ceases to be an object of much estimation; and the advantages of education are slighted and despised. And while their increasing numbers and profligacy render them truly an object of alarm to the friends of peace and order, the mutual affection and dependence between the different ranks of the community, and the personal ties of respect and esteem, by which it is expedient, that the lower classes should be attached to those, who occupy superior stations, are nearly dissolved. By what means their condition may be meliorated in a temporal view, is a subject at present under

* This subject is more fully considered in a pamphlet lately published by the author of this discourse, entitled, *An Inquiry into the present Condition of the LOWER CLASSES, and the Means of improving it, &c.*

the consideration of the public. In one and a very important instance it is in your power to contribute to their improvement, and for that purpose your benevolence is now solicited. In proportion, as other motives and inducements to industry, sobriety, and virtue, are deficient, those, which religion presents to the mind, must be supplied with the greater zeal and assiduity. If the means of advancing themselves are wanting, let them at least be inspired with the desire of being distinguished by a superior propriety of conduct from those, that still remain in the lowest stage of civil degradation, and by mental improvements let their access be facilitated to the social converse of higher and more respectable classes. The less share also they possess either of the ability, or even of the desire, to procure for their children the benefit of a good education, it is the more indispensably necessary, that you should provide the means of instruction, and assist in forming such early habits, as may dispose and prepare them to improve the advantages, that still lie within their reach. And let your zealous exertions for their good awaken their gratitude, and revive and confirm their attachment and regard for you.

The designations of providence are manifestly benevolent. But, in the present state of proba-

tion, it is apparently permitted to depend upon human conduct, whether the improvement of society shall be regularly progressive; accompanied by the various blessings of peace and harmony, and the advancing prosperity of every class; or whether, as good eventually resulting from evil, it should prove only the remote consequence of direful calamities, operating as a just punishment on the misconduct of an existing race, and an awful example of divine retribution to future generations. If the goods of fortune, the advantages of situation, and the various powers and faculties, which we each of us severally possess, are religiously employed in reforming the most prominent imperfections in the state of society, in encouraging virtuous conduct, and in promoting an union of interest and affection between the several orders of mankind, we may then reasonably expect, that the general prosperity of the community, and the comfort and enjoyment of its individual members, will be continually advancing in an uninterrupted progress. If otherwise an universal selfishness pervade every rank,—if our only employment of the several blessings of providence be to secure to ourselves every gratification of sense within our grasp,—if the unbounded luxury of each higher class prove only an example of ruinous expenditure to the inferior orders of the community, and an insult, as

it were, over their more contracted means of dissolute pleasures, while we incautiously disregard *the signs of the times*,—existing imperfections will necessarily increase, till they defy the controuling hand of reformation, and an awful convulsion, or a series of dreadful calamities, is the unavoidable consequence. The tranquillity of society is then only effectually secured, when the ties of personal regard and respect are rendered coincident with the links of civil subordination,—when the bonds of mutual interest and dependence are corroborated by a ready exchange of beneficent offices,—and when each lower class is ambitious to merit, and receives with gratitude, such favours, as its superiors liberally communicate. Every reformation also of whatever appears most faulty in the condition of society, that it may be successfully conducted through every stage, without unnecessarily disturbing the present state of social order, must be commenced, in due time, by those, whose interests are most nearly concerned, who best know the value of the blessings of peace, and who possess the largest share of power and opportunity to guide and superintend its progress. An improvement of manners, is, indeed, that species of reformation, which universally demands the public attention,—which will either seasonably prevent a profligate and ruinous derangement of civil order, or prepare the way for accomplishing,

with ease and safety, any acknowledged improvement in the political organization of society.

My Christian brethren, I am persuaded, it requires not much argument to convince you, that the present is not a season for apathy, and remissness. Infidelity and licentiousness have already made an alarming progress, and the promulgation of opinions fundamentally subversive of all due subordination, and destructive of every valuable interest, has been attended with an external, and imposing, appearance of success. Never, therefore, did it more nearly concern us to recollect, that riches, the several faculties and endowments of body and mind, and every other advantage we enjoy by the blessing of providence, are to be regarded only as sacred deposits, which we are to employ, as stewards of the household of God, in promoting his benevolent designs, and advancing the general improvement and happiness of mankind. In short, as we value the safety, and even existence, of every object, that is most dear to us, it is our indispensable concern to *make* to ourselves *friends*, by a religious and discreet use of *the mammon of unrighteousness*. Nor can there be a more seasonable act of beneficence, than that, which, at the same time it prepares the minds of our inferiors to fulfil the duties of their station with greater comfort to themselves, and

advantage to the community, disposes them also to have a just sense of the benefits conferred, and to regard it, as a religious obligation, to acknowledge them with gratitude.

It is not now the time to discuss the question, whether a universal diffusion of knowledge is expedient, or not. It is no longer practicable, my brethren, were it indeed the object of our wishes, to retain the common people in ignorance, as the means of securing them from moral contagion, or political disaffection.* *The children of this*

* It cannot but be remarked, how much their sentiments, who disapprove of general instruction, disagree with the practice of those nations, whose policy has been most celebrated, which regarded education as the most efficacious means of ensuring the tranquillity of society, and political union. Their object was to promote a uniformity of manners and customs, and give perpetuity to an approved national character, and their established mode of education was regulated accordingly. In China there are numerous free schools in every province, in which the rich and poor are received, and instructed alike. Prizes are offered, and other means used to excite emulation; and the children even of the lowest peasants, by means of their talents, often rise to the highest offices of state. Thus are the people disciplined to civil obedience, and, in consequence, that immensely populous country has been preserved in a state of great tranquillity, and simplicity of manners, with but little variation of national character, for some thousands of years. Sparta, by the like influence of education, was enabled to retain its martial spirit, and unexampled character of rigid virtue, amidst the various and increasing corruptions of Greece, till it

world at all times *wiser in their generation, than the children of light*, have already circulated with interested zeal, and unrestrained audacity, such

was at length irresistibly overwhelmed by superior force. The institutions of Crete were similar, which preserved its ancient character of probity and valour for more than a thousand years, and at last made a braver resistance to the Roman arms, than the most powerful kings. During the present greater freedom of intercourse, which an extensive commerce has introduced between different nations, it would not be more practicable, than expedient, to aim at a permanent uniformity of character. The more free spirit of education in this country, if rendered general, would conduce to the gradual advancement of truth and virtue, and an uniform improvement, rather than perpetuity of national character, ensuring to us the advantages, and preserving us from the injurious consequences of an unrestrained communication with foreigners. Notwithstanding the opposition of superior authority a spirit of liberal inquiry has of late years diffused itself amongst the higher classes in France; but by its too sudden and rapid progress it has been attended with much wildness and extravagance of opinion; while the common people yet remained immersed in slavish ignorance. That the diffusion of knowledge in this country, after the reformation, was more gradual, and more general, has prevented our struggles for a reform in our government from being attended with calamities equally mournful and atrocious, as those, by which that unhappy country has been desolated. But, notwithstanding larger sums are now expended from motives of charity in the education of poor children, it is much to be feared, that for reasons assigned, page 3, the lower classes are for the most part less enlightened, than they were a century ago. The inference is, that the call for our charitable assistance is greater, and that our zeal has not been proportioned to the urgency of the demand.

sentiments, by which every source and principle
 of virtuous conduct are subverted, and every bond,
 by which society is united together in harmony
 and attachment, is dissolved. We have now, there-
 fore, to resist, and oppose the *overflowing* torrents
 of *ungodliness*, and to rescue the yet unpolluted
 minds of the rising generation, before they are
 overwhelmed in its contaminating inundations.
 It is surely essential to the well-being of society,
 that mental improvements, and the diffusion of
 liberal and religious knowledge should at least
 keep pace with the progress of corruption. But
 to guide the infant mind securely into the paths
 of religion, and virtue, is a work of labour and
 perseverance; while the maxims of anarchy and
 licentiousness strike root with ease into the unin-
 formed mind, as a congenial soil. In the vile
 haunts of abandoned profligacy, in scenes of
 intemperate riot, and midnight revelry, they
 are greedily swallowed with every intoxicating
 draught. Indeed the facility, with which any
 notions are imbibed by the less enlightened part
 of mankind, depends not so much on the extent
 of prior information, as on the nature of the ha-
 bits, that have been previously contracted. The
 man, who has lived for many years in ignorance,
 or contempt, of religious truth, is gladly per-
 suaded, that religion is a falsehood, and that a
 future state of retribution is a groundless appre-

hension. Those, who are strangers to honest industry, and have affixed no limit to the gratification of their vicious desires, are easily instructed to regard every seasonable restraint imposed by good government on their uncontrouled appetites, as an act of despotism, and to conclude, that the superior comforts and accommodations of life, of which they are unwilling to acquire a share by sobriety and diligence, are withheld from them by a tyrannical usurpation.

The present unsettled state also of the public mind with regard to religious opinions portends consequences by no means favourable to social harmony. It cannot, indeed, be expected, that an uninformed mind, if at length brought to a state of religious recollection, and a conviction of past transgressions, should be duly prepared to discriminate between truth and error, or to adopt such sentiments, as are most congenial with the attributes of God, most conducive to the well-being of society, or most compatible with the proper duties of its station. It would be invidious, and painful, to attempt to enumerate the several causes,* in addition to the defect of early

* The causes are so very multifarious, that it is not designed to convey a reflection, exclusively, on any particular class of individuals. The consequences, however, are of too important a nature, in the present times, to be regarded with perfect indif-

instruction, by which multitudes even of well-intentioned Christians have of late years been induced to desert their parish churches, and the instructions of their regular pastors, whom they have hitherto regarded with much deserved respect and approbation. Being thus disunited in affection from their parochial ministers, they then, it is probable, rove from one preacher to another, till, by an easy gradation, they are next alienated entirely from the established church, and at length are converted into a political faction. Their children equally disaffected from their infancy, with regard to existing establishments, and deprived of those seasonable attachments towards their nearest neighbours, and immediate superiors, by which the peace of society is best secured, will of course be destitute of the most powerful motives and

ference. It will not be pretended, it is presumed, that this change in the religious and political professions of the lowest, and most ignorant, classes, is the result of undoubted conviction. In both instances, there is a strong suspicion, that a principal cause, as well as the natural effect, is insubordination. Indeed to attempt, by an accommodation to the weaknesses and prejudices of common minds, to make a stronger impression of religious sentiments, is, at best, but a hazardous experiment, as, eventually, cherishing, rather than correcting, many of their injurious propensities. But whatever may be the several causes of this religious and political disunion, every Christian is hereby seriously exhorted to use all honest means of restraining it, and, amongst others, such, as are recommended in the present discourse.

incentives to private virtue, as well as civil obedience.

The superior liberality of the present age justly disposes us to regard human error and imperfection with condescension and indulgence. But, alas! with little reason can we boast of our increasing liberality, if it approximate to licentiousness, or terminate in lukewarmth and indifference; if, in proportion as we view those with less horror and aversion, who differ from us in opinion, we be more remiss in our endeavours to direct the public mind aright. If the only effort of our liberality be to oppose vulgar prejudices and superstitions, it is much to be feared, that with those prejudices we shall subvert the fundamental principles of religious truth, and moral obligation. According as we are remiss, others on the one hand less liberal in their religious conceptions, or, on the other, devoid of every religious principle, equally pertinacious in their sentiments, or impelled by interested motives, will be more assiduous in their endeavours to render the public opinions subservient to their respective views.

It is not to be expected, that we should generate in common minds a philosophical accuracy of sentiment. The principal object of popular

education is to inspire virtuous sensations, and to lay the foundation of regular and diligent conduct, rather than to produce altogether a correct mode of thinking :—but, if the mind is properly disciplined, it will hardly fail to think aright with regard to the duties of common life. It is sufficient, then, in general, that the minds of children are deeply impressed with the fundamental truths of religion ; that their earliest habits are rendered conformable to the principles of moral duty ; that they are taught betimes to know the comforts of honest and frugal industry, and the satisfactions of conscious integrity. It must be our endeavour by seasonable trials to awaken the latent energies of the understanding, and to call into existence such good qualities, as best become the posts, they are designed to occupy in social life. By the influence of personal attentions, and encouragements, we must inspire them with a laudable desire of meriting our approbation by a diligent proficiency in the subjects proposed to their attention. Thus will they conceive an early attachment and respect for ourselves, which will increase with their growing years, and will be disposed to make it equally their study, in their future lives, to deserve the good opinion of the respectable part of mankind, and their political superiors, and, what is of much more importance, to ensure the approbation of God.

In short, in the present state of society, it is from schools,—from an improved system of puerile instruction, rather than from the pulpit,—that a fundamental reformation of manners must deduce its origin. If the task of education is effectually accomplished, the office of the preacher will, then, be more successfully discharged in cherishing the rising flame of juvenile piety,—in raising the superstructure of religious knowledge on the foundation already securely laid,—or in recalling the wandering sinner, who has incautiously strayed from the virtuous paths, into which he had been kindly directed by the fostering hand of sagacious discipline.

With reference to the subjects I have now proposed to your consideration, it is obvious to remark the following advantages in the institution, which at present solicits your charitable assistance.—The early habit of appearing clean, and decently clothed, in society with respectable persons, on one day in the week, is, of itself, a considerable advance towards a state of civilization in those, who are degraded to the lowest condition of society, and may excite a laudable desire of the reasonable comforts and accommodations of life, which is a powerful incentive to frugal industry.—The ordinary schools for the education of poor children were extremely de-

ficient with regard to religious instruction, and the Sunday was commonly spent the most unprofitably, I should rather say, the most viciously, of any day in the week. A seminary appropriated to religious education seemed, therefore, indispensably necessary.—There is also one circumstance in your schools, which merits the most unqualified approbation. Every sect of Christians, into which this town is unhappily divided, has zealously concurred in the support of one uniform design, and a similar mode of instruction. To effect this object, the disputed points are necessarily removed somewhat from present contemplation, and the youthful mind is habitually prepossessed with an opinion of the superior importance of the fundamental principles of Christian faith and practice. From this we may venture to augurate the most desirable consequences;—that the asperity of controversy, and schismatic zeal, will be gradually extinguished;—that, though we may still differ in opinion, we shall be better disposed to co-operate as friends and brethren in the promotion of every good work;—that, however, the path will be facilitated for that approximation of sentiment, which is the natural result of the advancement, and diffusion of liberal knowledge.—To this I may add with peculiar satisfaction, that the higher classes have hitherto discovered a very commendable zeal in the sup-

port and conduct of Sunday Schools; and by the influence of their personal attentions, and well-timed encouragements, I may venture to assert from my own experience, that many children, with a small share of assistance from their friends in the course of the week, have made a much more creditable proficiency in their learning, than the generality of those, who have been educated in the common daily schools.

But, from the instructions only of a few hours of one day in a week, much improvement cannot, in general, be expected. I have, therefore, been accustomed to regard Sunday Schools with approbation, principally, as the commencement of a comprehensive, and much more perfect scheme of popular instruction: and am induced to hope, the period is not distant, when, with a similarity of intention, of providing instruction for those leisure hours, which are best spared from ordinary employments, the Sunday Schools will be so extended in their design, as to comprehend also daily evening instructions. You cannot but regard it, as an object of the greatest importance, that that very time, which is now, for want of other occupation, too generally devoted to intemperate riot, and profligate discourse, should, by the force of early habit, be consecrated to employments, by which the mind is improved; or, at

least, rationally amused. In proportion, as your charitable contributions are enlarged, the design may be extended with the greatest facility. One evening may first be added to the Sunday, and a select portion of the scholars only admitted. Sincerely wishing, as I do, that this proposal may one time be reduced to practice, I shall presume to recommend, (if that presumption will be pardoned me by the very respectable persons, to whom my opinions are with deference submitted;) that, in the gradual extension of your plan, a preference be shewn to the education of girls; for which advice, from a variety of very important arguments, I shall be content, at present, to select the following. The minds of girls are, commonly, more susceptible of pious impressions at an early period, than those of boys, and are more easily inspired with a desire of improvement. The conduct of men also depends in an extraordinary degree upon the manners of women:—and, in proportion, as women are taught to respect their own characters, the morals of men will be pure, and their manners refined and dignified. To which I shall add, that the earliest impressions, and the first habits, as well as the whole conduct of domestic education, in poor families, depend almost entirely on the mother's care and prudence.*

* It was designed, by the above passage, to direct the thoughts of the congregation to the subject of female education, though

I have now only to exhort you by every consideration, that is, or ought to be, most dear to you, as you value the peace of society, or as you regard your own comfort and security, that you will afford the most liberal support to the institution; we this day celebrate, as the means of reforming those imperfections, which, in the present state of society, are most alarming. Think it not sufficient, then, to continue your accustomed assistance. In proportion, as the necessity is urgent, let your contributions be enlarged, that the good fruits may be more abundant, that the *light of your good works* may *shine* with increasing splendour to the glory of your heavenly father. Œconomy in the lower classes, we have remarked, is almost annihilated, and their profligacy is deplorable. But with what air of consistency, or pro-

the limits of the discourse would not admit of its being diffusely handled. Much less liberal provisions have been made for the education of poor girls, than of boys, though what is, or may, easily, be taught in schools, and a little school discipline, are of much more essential importance to them, for many interesting reasons, connected with the present state of society; nor is there any subject, in which they are more in want of instruction, than whatever has respect to domestic œconomy. It might be improper to swell the present publication by descending upon the subject in this place, but were any beneficial purpose likely to be effected, the author would think a portion of his time well employed, on some future occasion, in arranging his sentiments, and submitting them to the public inspection.

spect of effect, can you recommend it to them to eke out the small pittance, which they have dearly earned by the sweat of their brow, and to abstain from the few indulgences, that still lie within their reach; when your prodigal expences know no bounds, when you deny yourselves no one species of luxurious gratification, and when your own examples refute every principle you wish to inculcate? The conclusion is obvious. By the same act, by which you may preserve yourselves from conscious remorse, from aggravating the calamities, to which we are exposed, you may exhibit a seasonable example of retrenchment of needless expences, and diffuse those funds, which are at present unprofitably exhausted, in providing for the instruction, and advancing the temporal and spiritual comforts of your inferior brethren. Are public exhibitions, and crowded scenes of gaiety, and festivity, the objects of your delight? Can there be a spectacle more grateful to the feelings of every virtuous breast, than that, which is now before you, of about five hundred children, displaying an external appearance of neatness, decency, and comfort, taught to unite in the praises of their maker, and kindly directed from the sink of profligacy, filth, and ignorance, into those paths, which will conduct them to utility, and respect, in this world, and, hereafter, to everlasting happiness? Are so-

cial pleasures the principal cause of your accustomed expences? What social pleasures can be more enviable, than to secure to yourselves the gratitude, the esteem, and affection of every poor person within the sphere of your connections? Make then a liberal provision for their early instruction; be the guide of their youth; be their friend, their patron, and counsellor, during their advancing age, and the comfort and support of their declining years. Thus will you rivet the chains of mutual interest and attachment, on which the harmony of society depends; and in proportion, as they can make you no equivalent returns in this world, you will be recompensed at the resurrection of the just. Compare now the donation, you probably have intended to contribute, with the expence of one evening of fashionable amusement, one elegant repast, or the unnecessary gratifications, with which you almost daily, and hourly, indulge yourselves, and reflect, whether your consciences can deduce any satisfaction from the contrast. Compute the number of destitute children, whose education might be effectually provided for by the sums, that are most unprofitably consumed in one short course of fashionable dissipation, or a single excursion of fruitless pleasure; and ask yourselves,—is there not one instance of needless expence you can consent to relinquish, that you may extend your wonted,

or intended contributions, to the great glory of God, the advancement of true religion and virtue, and the accelerated progress of Christ's kingdom upon earth? Perhaps by the sacrifice of a single unnecessary, or, it may be, vicious pleasure, you may prove the happy instrument of preserving some friendless youth from a life of crimes, and wretchedness, and an untimely, ignominious death, or of rescuing some one helpless female orphan from the very jaws of prostitution. The delightful thought will be an abundant source of consolation in every season of affliction and distress; it will comfort you in the evil day of sickness and infirmity; and will cheer and support your soul at the awful moment of expiration.

FINIS.

6 JUL 65

Lately published, by the same Author,

An INQUIRY into the PRESENT CONDITION of the LOWER CLASSES, and the Means of improving it, including some Remarks on Mr. PITT's BILL for the better Support and Maintenance of the Poor: in the course of which the POLICY of the CORN LAWS is examined, and various other important Branches of POLITICAL ŒCONOMY are illustrated.

Printed for, and sold by J. Debrett, Piccadilly: sold also by W. Keymer, jun. of whom may be had the following Tracts, by the same Author:

1. A SERMON preached in the Parish Church of St. James, Colchester, on Sunday the 24th of August, 1788, for the Benefit of the CHARITY SCHOOL.

2. The NECESSITY of introducing DIVINITY into the regular Course of ACADEMICAL STUDIES considered: and other Regulations suggested for the Improvement of the present Mode of Education in the UNIVERSITY of CAMBRIDGE.

3. SELECT QUESTIONS and ANSWERS on the KNOWLEDGE and PRACTICE of the CHRISTIAN RELIGION; compiled for the Use of a Sunday School.

4. SELECT PORTIONS of PSALMS from different Versions; to which are added a few occasional HYMNS.



I hereby certify that the following is a true and correct copy of the original as submitted to me by the said Author.

AT 12.15 PM on the 14th day of January 1911, I received from the said Author a copy of a manuscript of a paper for publication in the *Proceedings of the Royal Society*, in which the author claims to have discovered a new method of determining the *atomic weight* of the *element* *Carbon*, and various other important facts in connection with the *chemistry* of the *element* *Carbon*.

I have read the manuscript and find it to be a valuable contribution to the knowledge of the *chemistry* of the *element* *Carbon*, and I am of opinion that it is worthy of publication in the *Proceedings of the Royal Society*.

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